

**AUTHOR:**SJ Mosala<sup>1</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6305-436X>JCM Venter<sup>2</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7852-2915>EG Bain<sup>3</sup>**AFFILIATION:**<sup>1</sup>Master's graduate,  
North-West University<sup>2</sup>Political sciences,  
North-West University<sup>3</sup>Benchmarks Centre for Corporate  
Social Responsibility,  
North-West University**CORRESPONDENCE TO:**JCM Venter  
[jan.venter@nwu.ac.za](mailto:jan.venter@nwu.ac.za)**POSTAL ADDRESS:**Private Bag X6001, Potchefstroom  
Campus, North-West University,  
Potchefstroom, 2520, South Africa**DATES:**

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# The National Democratic Revolution (NDR) in South Africa: An ideological journey

## ABSTRACT

Many people are familiar with South Africa's political past – the prolonged periods of colonialism and oppression of the black majority, and the eventual dismantling of apartheid and the introduction of a new democratic order. Relatively few people, however, know what principles actually steered South Africa on its journey towards freedom and democracy.

It is not uncommon for oppressed people to rise up and institute change through violent revolution. While some groups of people threw their weight behind the idea of an armed struggle, South Africa's revolution was largely an ideological one – characterised by a succession of struggle leaders debating the merits of communism vs. socialism, forming resistance groups and alliances, and producing authoritative treatises on how to achieve political and economic liberation (not so much a revolution but a bloody evolution). With the desired political dispensation long since attained, South Africa now faces the formidable challenge of freeing the majority of the population from economic bondage – an outcome that few anticipated back in 1994.

This paper traces the history of the 'National Democratic Revolution' (NDR) as it applies to South Africa – from its tentative beginnings, to its heyday, to the present time when overwhelming economic challenges are now threatening to eclipse much of the ideological fervour and progress of years gone by.

**Keywords:** Class alliance; colonialism; democracy; Freedom Charter; National Democratic Revolution; socialism; Tripartite Alliance; political resistance.

## Opsomming

Die Suid Afrikaanse politieke verlede is bekend aan baie mense – die uitgerekte tydperke van kolonialisme en die verdrukking van die swart meerderheid, en die uiteindelijke aftekening van apartheid en die inleiding tot 'n nuwe demokratiese bestel. Betreklik min mense is egter bewus van watter beginsels Suid Afrika se reis tot vryheid en demokrasie bepaal het.

Dit is nie ongewoon vir onderdrukte mense om in opstand te kom en verandering te bewerkstellig deur gewelddadige revolusie nie. Suid Afrika se revolusie was hoofsaaklik van ideologiese aard – gekenmerk deur 'n opeenvolging van anti-apartheidsleiers wie die meriete van kommunisme vs sosialisme, die vorming van weerstandsbewegings en alliansies, en wie gesaghebbende geskifte oor hoe om politieke en ekonomiese vryheid te bekom, gedebatteer het. Met die verlangde politieke bestel reeds stewig gevestig, moet Suid Afrika nou egter die besondere uitdaging hoe om die meerderheid van die bevolking van ekonomiese gevangenskap te bevry.

Die artikel verken die geskiedenis van die Nasionale Demokratiese Revolusie (NDR) soos van toepassing op Suid Afrika – van sy ontstaan, gevolg deur 'n bloeitydperk, tot die huidige bestel waarin groot ekonomiese uitdagings nou dreig om die ideologiese ywer en ontwikkeling wat tot stand gebring is, te verskraal.

## Sleutelwoorde

Demokrasie; klasalliansie; kolonialisme; nasionale demokratiese revolusie; politieke weerstand; sosialisme; driepartyalliansie; vryheidsmanifes;

## 1. Introduction

The arrival of the Dutch settlers in South Africa in 1652 set the tone for a succession of minority governments helping to ensure that the largely black majority would remain economically (and until fairly recently) politically marginalised in the country of their birth. Not surprisingly, this has fomented much political backlash, including a protracted underground resistance movement in the run-up to South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994.

History has repeatedly shown that the unjust oppression of groups of people inevitably leads to a gestation of revolution, which may or may not lead to the violent removal of the government of the day. Throughout much of the twentieth century, South Africa's political struggle (which in some quarters came to be known as the National Democratic Revolution, or NDR) was evidenced in increasingly strident calls for a change in traditional political and economic thinking, and both passive and active resistance against the status quo. The 1990s heralded a new political dispensation in South Africa, but the path towards economic inclusiveness has remained rocky and continues to create schisms throughout society.

The ANC (1969, 1991 and 2007) defines the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) as "a dialectical resolution of class, gender and national contradictions". In the eyes of COSATU, the NDR has a natural developmental bias towards the worker and the poor. The SACP (2007), in turn, sees the NDR's role as championing the defeat of repressive and colonial regimes, and transforming the underlying, systematic features of South African society that continue to oppress according to race, gender and class.

A common thread running through the above definitions of the NDR is the need to remove the political and economic manifestations of the so-called Colonialism of a Special Type (CST) or apartheid. According to Jeffery and Cronjé (2010) and Filatova (2012:517), the NDR is the ideology of the ANC-COSATU-SACP Tripartite Alliance. In fact, SACP General Secretary Blade Nzimande has referred to the NDR as the glue that holds the Alliance together (Nzimande 2006). In recent times, however, the NDR and the keepers of this ideology have come under attack for not transforming fast enough. According to Julius Malema, the vociferously outspoken leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) party, efforts to bring about political and economic change in South Africa have been insipid, with Nelson Mandela and the ANC having turned their backs on "part of the revolution" (Grey 2015). With the rumblings of discontent becoming louder, a reconstruction of the revolutionary ideology of the NDR is both timeous and important.

An 'ideology' can be defined as a more or less coherent, systematic and consistent set of ideas and values that provide a basis for political action, whether this is intended to pressure, modify or overthrow the existing system of power relationships (Seliger, 1976; Heywood, 2007:45). Thus, an ideology describes an existing order (status quo), which it depicts as being undesirable, and a desired model for the future together with a broad implementation framework (Baradat, 2009:8).

In this paper we will explore the political and intellectual thinking surrounding the NDR since its formulation, as well as significant events and decisions that have influenced the NDR's trajectory over the years. This exposition is set against the following periods in South Africa's politically charged history:

- Colonialism and its effects on black politics;
- Political resistance and the spread of socialist influence;
- Dual strategies of guerrilla warfare and political effort;
- The assentation to government and changes to the NDR.

In the chronological/developmental description offered above, it is possible to discern the progression of the NDR as an ideology. In tracking this progression it is interesting to reflect on the changes that took place in the worldviews<sup>1</sup> of some resistance leaders. For instance, earlier on in 'the struggle', Chief Albert Luthuli was not a supporter of the armed struggle, famously proclaiming from a Christian standpoint: "I have embraced the non-violent Passive Resistance technique in fighting for freedom because I am convinced it is the only non-revolutionary, legitimate and humane way that could be used by people denied, as we are, effective constitutional means to further aspirations" and "The wisdom or foolishness of this decision I place in the hands of the Almighty" ... "God will provide" and ... "The Road to Freedom is Via the Cross"<sup>2</sup> (Lal, 2014:35). This position changed as time passed, as can be seen in this paper. For a lengthy period the resistance of the Black community was peaceful and system orientated as they petitioned the governments in Britain and the old Boer Republics. As the struggle progressed, the Marxist revolutionary dialectical analysis of history became dominant. The next section reviews the colonialism era as the essential backdrop to black politics in South Africa.

## 2. Colonialism and its effects on black politics

The era of colonialism in South Africa roughly straddled the period 1652 to 1920, with significant milestones being the arrival of the Dutch settlers in 1652, the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the formation of the ANC in 1912, and the passing of racial legislation by the Union government in 1913 and again in 1923.

### 2.1 The arrival of the Dutch in 1652 and the British in 1806

According to liberationist literature, the start of the first wave of colonialism in South Africa can be traced to 1652 when Jan van Riebeeck and other settlers travelling with the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie<sup>3</sup>) arrived at the Cape with the aim of establishing a refreshment station at the Cape to replenish food on the ships of Dutch East India Company on their long voyage to the east). This ultimately led to the establishment of a colony in South Africa by a foreign power (Currie & De Waal, 2001:41; SACP 1962; Cornelissen *et al.*, 2006:211).

The second wave of colonialism began in 1806 when British military forces arrived and wrested control of the Cape Colony from the Dutch settlers (Cornelissen *et al.*, 2006:211). This marked the start of a new chapter in South Africa's colonial history (SACP 1962). The British colonialists waged a series of wars of conquest against Xhosa and Zulu people in the Eastern Cape and Natal, respectively, and large numbers of British settlers were imported into the area of white domination to expand the colony. During this period British colonialism was characterised by a system of racial capitalism which would later spread to countries such as Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Lesotho (Terreblanche, 2002:14).

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1 The term *worldview* is, for the purposes of this article, defined as: an encompassing concept implying that everything in reality represents certain modalities, such as numerical, spatial, physical, biotic, emotional, aesthetic, logical, historical, lingual, social, economic, aesthetic, juridical, ethical, and as faith (Van der Walt, 2008:6).

2 Raymond Suttner's analysis probes the ambiguity and symbolism of the work of Luthuli, pointing to the possibility that much of Luthuli's work may have opened up debate on the apparent fruitlessness of non-violence against an intransigent regime (Suttner, 2010).

3 The Dutch East India Company, also known as Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, was a merchant trading joint-stock company which created a commercial and territorial empire in the Indian Ocean and Southern African region in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Currie & De Waal, 2001:41; Cornelissen *et al.*, 2006:337).

The discovery of diamonds in Kimberley in 1867 and gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886 led to the large-scale proletarianisation<sup>4</sup> of Africans, and prompted a surge in industrial and economic development in South Africa (Terreblanche, 2002:12). According to Marais (1998:8), the 'two nations' society in South Africa (the rich white economic nation and the poor black economic nation) was spawned in the late nineteenth century – with the passing of the Glen Grey Act of 1894, for example, depriving Africans of access to much of the land they had traditionally occupied (Terreblanche, 2002:12). Colonialism the world over was creating the need for a class alliance among those struggling for national independence. Such a class alliance was first popularised by Karl Marx in his document on permanent revolution.

## 2.2 *The formation of the Union of South Africa (1910) and the SANNC (1912<sup>5</sup>)*

By 1910, the Boer Republics and Great Britain had buried the hatchet following their bitter clash in the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. The establishment of the Union of South Africa that year was the start of a new era in which blacks would have to endure even greater marginalisation and be viewed as second-class citizens (Gumede, 2007:3). The Union, which brought together the four British colonies of the Transvaal, Orange Free State, Cape Colony and Natal Colony, came into being with the passing of the South African Act of 1909 by the British Parliament. This Act effectively formalised Britain's colonial conquest over South Africa (Currie & De Waal, 2001:40-43; Shivambu, 2014:35) and consolidated racially-induced capitalism in the country.

This ongoing marginalisation of the African majority by the colonialists provided the impetus for the formation of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in Bloemfontein in 1912. In 1914, a deputation was sent to Britain to petition King George V for the following:

1st. That there shall not be, in the eye of the law, any distinction or qualification whatever, founded on mere distinction of colour, origin, or language, or creed; but that the protection of the law, in letter and in substance, shall be extended impartially to all alike. 2nd. That no aggression shall be sanctioned upon the natives residing beyond the limits of the Colony, under any plea whatever, by private person or anybody of men, unless acting under the immediate authority and orders of the Government. 3rd. That slavery, in any shape, or under any modification, is absolutely unlawful as in every other portion of His Majesty's Dominions (ANC 1914).

The British ignored this peaceful overture, however. It was clear that they did not want to intervene in South Africa (in the tense period preceding the First World War) and the mission was judged a failure.

The discrimination against Africans was further entrenched when the Union government passed the Native Land Act 27 of 1913 and the Black Urban Areas Act 21 of 1923. These two pieces of legislation effectively reduced the entire African population to squatters by forcefully taking control of the land on which they had homes, earned a living and hoped to be buried. Shortly after the promulgation of the Native Land Act 27 of 1913, the SANNC sent a petition protesting against the Act and other pieces of legislation to the Prime Minister, General Louis Botha (*The Star*, 2011). The new laws also prohibited the permanent settlement of blacks in 'white areas' (Gumede, 2007:3).

In 1923 the SANNC was renamed the African National Congress (ANC). The founders of this

4 Proletarianisation is a process whereby people move – sometimes under duress – from being employers, land owners, unemployed or self-employed to being employed as wage labourers.

5 Later the ANC.

movement struggled to secure the recognition of 'civilised' Africans as individuals able to take part in the political and socio-economic activities of South Africa. An organised domestic opposition was becoming a growing imperative. This manifested as political resistance and the spread of socialist influence throughout South Africa.

### **3. Political resistance and the spread of the socialist influence**

From 1915 onwards, the idea of political resistance in South Africa slowly infiltrated the mind-set of the disenfranchised black population – influenced by the socialist teachings of Marx, the formation of the International Socialist League of South Africa (ISL) in 1915, the staging of various revolutionary congresses in the 1920s in different parts of Africa, and the formation of communist organisations such as the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) in 1921. Socialism became the common cause of oppressed people internationally.

#### **3.1 *The International Socialist League of South Africa (ISL) (1915)***

The International Socialist League of South Africa (ISL) was formed when a section of the White Labour Party broke away from the parent body over conflicting views about whether or not to participate in the First World War (Bunting, 1998:23). The ISL viewed the situation in South Africa through a Marxist filter and concluded that its purpose was to unite the working class in South Africa, regardless of race and gender. The ISL realised that socialism in the country could not be restricted to the whites and must include all races (Bunting, 1998:26). To this end the League made contact with a number of black formations as well as with the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU). It also established the first industrial African trade union, the Industrial Workers of Africa (IWA), in 1917 (Bunting, 1998:26). In 1921, in the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1917<sup>6</sup>, the League was dissolved and resurrected as the Communist Party of South Africa. The early 1920s also saw a number of international conferences, such as the Comintern (discussed below), being staged which provided the platform for spirited debates about nationalism and colonialism.

#### **3.2 *The Second Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) (1920)***

The Second Congress of the Communist International (Comintern) was convened in Petrograd and Moscow during the period 19 July to 7 August 1920. One of the discussions at the congress, led by Vladimir Lenin, centred on the report by the Commission on the National and Colonial Question which dealt with imperialism and the working class struggle in the colonies. The report highlighted the glaring disparities between a large number of oppressed nations and a small number of oppressor nations which enjoyed colossal wealth and powerful armed forces (Lenin, 1920). It was resolved at the congress that the Comintern and proletariat parties in backward countries must support the bourgeois-democratic government in instigating a revolution by the exploited masses (Lenin, 1920).

The report also discussed the wording that should be used to describe the revolution in backward countries. Because of the support shown by the Comintern and proletarian parties in backward countries for the bourgeois-democratic movement, it was agreed that reference should be made to a national revolutionary movement rather than a bourgeois-democratic movement. Consequently, the Second Congress of the Comintern adopted the phrase 'national revolutionary movements'. Such movements, however, also had a democratic component – hence, the 'National Democratic Revolution'.

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6 The legacy of the Revolution provided the inspiration for millions of workers and peasants throughout the world who sought to overthrow capitalism in Europe between the two World Wars. It also provided the impetus for the formation of the Communist Party of South Africa in 1921 (Legassick, 2007:158).

As a follow-up to the Second Congress of the Comintern, the First International Anti-Colonial Conference was held in Baku, Azerbaijan, where the same sentiments about the need for a class alliance were expressed.

### **3.3 The Congress of the People of the East (1920)**

On 1 September 1920, the Comintern convened the Congress of the People of the East in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. The congress was attended by 1,891 delegates from a wide range of countries, including Turkey, Persia, Egypt, India, Afghanistan, Syria, Palestine, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and the Comintern's Far Eastern District. Most of the delegates were from backward countries under imperialist rule.

This congress produced a manifesto of the Congress of the People of the East, which outlined the strategy for fighting imperialist rule. The congress also endorsed the resolution that had been adopted at the Second Congress of the Comintern in July 1920 to support bourgeois-democratic movements and to forge alliances, under the Comintern banner, between the peasants and proletarian parties in backward countries. In 1921, the newly formed Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) became an affiliate of the Comintern.

### **3.4 The formation of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) (1921)**

The Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) was established in Cape Town in July 1921, largely in response to the Second Congress of the Comintern and the Congress of the People of the East, both of which had taken place the previous year. Various leftist organisations, including the International Socialist League (ISL), were behind the CPSA's formation, whose goal was to unite workers in South Africa – regardless of race and gender – in a quest to introduce socialism into the country. In 1953, the CPSA was renamed the South African Communist Party (SACP) and it became the South African affiliate of the Comintern (Bunting, 1998:26).

Despite the CPSA's efforts, it fell short in uniting the South African working class. In December 1928, the Seventh Annual Conference of the CPSA adopted a radical new programme under the watchful eye of the Comintern, namely "...an Independent South African Native Republic as a stage towards the workers' and peasants' republic, guaranteeing protection and complete equality to all national minorities" (Legassick 2007:157). The adoption of this two-stage programme (that is, bringing about the Independent South African Native Republic and achieving equality for national minorities) was intended to address the questions of race, poverty, inequality and political participation. This in turn led to the adoption of the *Native Republic Thesis* by the Comintern in 1928.

### **3.5 The adoption of the Native Republic Thesis (1928)**

At the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in 1928 in Moscow, its executive committee adopted a resolution on 'the South African question'. South Africa was described as a British dominion of the colonial type. In the resolution it was stated that the development of capitalist production had led to British imperialism, manifesting as the economic exploitation of the country through the participation of the white bourgeois of South Africa, Brit and Boer (Communist International 1928). This collaboration did not alter the general colonial character of the South African economy, however, since British capital continued to find its way into the principal economic sectors (banking, mining and industry) and the South African (white) bourgeois were just as interested in exploiting the black population as the British were (Communist International 1928). The 'South African question' was brought into sharper focus by the phenomenon of the majority of the peasant-owned land (87%) having been expropriated by the white minority. This question would become the cornerstone of the (future) revolution in South Africa (Bunting, 1998:39).

The *Native Republic Thesis* also resolved that the CPSA should pay particular attention to the embryonic organisations being spearheaded by the natives, such as the ANC. In this



regard, the CPSA, while retaining its full independence, should contribute to the work of these organisations and broaden the scope of the ANC's activities in particular, with a view to transforming the ANC into a nationalist revolutionary organisation capable of building a strong defence against the capitalists and British imperialists (Bunting, 1998:39). During the Second World War, in which South Africa participated on the side of the Allies, the revolutionary spirit in the country was fairly low key, but the national struggle was resuscitated in the early 1940s.

### **3.6 The adoption of the Africans' Claim in South Africa (1943) and the Programme of Action (1949), and the formation of the ANC Youth League (ANC-YL) (1944)**

The 1940s were characterised by a rejuvenation in, and intensification of, the struggle in South Africa, with the ANC adopting two significant documents, the *Africans' Claim in South Africa* in 1943 and the *Programme of Action* in 1949. Moreover, the formation of the ANC Youth League (ANC-YL) in 1944, which was in response to a resolution passed at the ANC's 1943 Congress, injected new life into the struggle and the ANC's work programme. The African miners' strike of 1946<sup>7</sup> was another event that fanned the struggle flames in the 1940s (Naicker, 1976).

The *Africans' Claim in South Africa* was adopted as official ANC policy on 16 December 1943 (Turok, 2008:20) and, for the first time in its history, the ANC was demanding full citizenship rights for the African people of South Africa and the abolition of all discrimination based on race; in other words, the ANC was demanding majority rule in South Africa (Turok 2008:20).

The formation of the ANC-YL in 1944 radicalised the politics of the ANC and ensured that the ANC became a party of the masses. The ANC-YL, tired of white paternalism and intransigence, demanded a shift towards a more militant style of politics (Glaser, 2012:11). This change in the policy of the ANC and its alliance partners was brought about because the white politics of the previous decades had spurned peaceful advances. The Youth League also used its influence to ensure the adoption of the *Programme of Action* in 1949, a blueprint for political action drawn up largely by the ANC-YL itself (Glaser, 2012:12). In the face of the more hostile and militant politics being propagated by the Youth League, the South African apartheid government stepped in and banned the CPSA.

### **3.7 The banning of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) (1950)**

Following the passing of the Suppression of Communism Act 44 of 1950, the CPSA was officially banned on 26 June of that year (Koster, 1986:16), but the CPSA had already dissolved itself voluntarily on 20 June out of fear of reprisal. Its dissolution, however, was not complete because the party still existed as an underground organisation. Those who were classified as communists in terms of the Act did not desist from being politically active because a great many of them maintained close ties with organisations such as the ANC, the Congress of Democrats and the South African Peace Council (Tambo, 1981; O'Malley, n.d. b). When changes to the ANC Constitution allowed whites into the party from 1943 onwards, it became easier for banned activists from the SACP to join the ANC (Koster, 1986:13-14). The SACP was then well placed to contribute to the drafting of the *Freedom Charter* in 1955.

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The African miners' strike of 1946 was a turning point in South African politics. On 12 August 1946, the African mine workers of the Witwatersrand (today largely Gauteng) went on a week-long strike to protest against police brutality. The strike was led by the African Mine Workers' Union with support from the SACP. This strike and the government's violent retaliation had a significant impact on the national liberation movements, with their adherents dispensing with their hitherto concessionary stance and replacing it with a more militant one (Naicker, 1976).

### 3.8 The adoption of the Freedom Charter (1955)

In the early 1950s, the ANC led the Congress Alliance whose members were the ANC, the (renamed) SACP, the South African Indian Congress (SAIC), the South African Congress of Democrats (SACOD), the South African Coloured People's Organisation (SACPO) and the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). In 1955, the Congress Alliance convened a special gathering, the Congress of the People<sup>8</sup>, in Kliptown, Johannesburg to draft the *Freedom Charter* (Bunting 1998:220). This document prepared the ground for a fully-inclusive (cutting across all groups and classes) set of objectives outlining a new dispensation for South Africa under a democratic government. The *Freedom Charter* was adopted by the ANC as its official policy document in 1956 (Shivambu, 2014:47).

The *Freedom Charter* was seen as revolutionary because the changes it envisaged could not be wrought without the economic and political structures of the (then) apartheid government being broken down (Bunting, 1998:221). The core tenets of the *Freedom Charter* were the nationalisation of mines, banks and monopoly industry, and the sharing of the country's wealth among its people. The document also called for agrarian reform: "the land shall be shared among those who work it" (Congress Alliance 1955).

The staging of the Congress of the People and the adoption of the *Freedom Charter* set the tone and momentum for South Africa's NDR (SADTU 2011). The widespread acceptance of the *Freedom Charter* represented the first step in the NDR and, together with the Independent Native South African Republic, a push towards a workers' and peasants' republic guaranteeing full rights to all races under an inclusive government. According to the SACP (1962), the *Freedom Charter* was the immediate programme of the national liberation alliance and a short-term programme of the SACP. As such, the implementation of the *Freedom Charter* marked the start of a transitional phase in which certain forms of capitalism were introduced to a limited extent, which in turn was an important step towards the introduction of socialism (Koster, 1986:43). The apartheid government reacted to "this communist document" by banning the liberation movements at the beginning of the 1960s.

## 4. Dual strategies of guerrilla warfare and political effort

The banning of the liberation movements in South Africa drove them underground and altered their stance from a non-violent, principled one to one advocating an armed, guerrilla-style struggle. The formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation) was in response to the government's crackdown on liberation movements and the declaration of South Africa as a Republic in 1961, and became the symbol of a more aggressive approach to seeking liberation. South Africa earned the reputation of practising Colonialism of a Special Type (CST) where coloniser and colonist lived together in the same country but were separated politically and economically – evidenced in a 'white South Africa' and a 'non-white South Africa'.

### 4.1 The banning of the liberation movements (1960s) and the formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation) (1961)

Following the adoption of the *Freedom Charter* by the Congress Alliance, the apartheid government introduced more repressive measures. With the government digging its heels in, the liberation movements took the opportunity presented by the struggle atmosphere to push for a pass boycott. On 21 March 1960, a large crowd marched to the Sharpeville police station with the intention of burning their passes in a show of collective strength. The police reacted by opening fire on unarmed civilians, killing a total of 69 people. This violent crackdown and the banning orders issued by the government left the native people

8 This is not to be confused with the present-day political party of the same name which was established in 2008. The latter (COPE) derived its name from the original Congress of the People which met in Kliptown.



floundering without a legal organisation to support them. This prompted another change in tactics by the ANC – a switch to guerrilla warfare.

The formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe in 1961 effectively kick-started the ANC's armed struggle, which was directed at forcing the apartheid government to the negotiating table. Nelson Mandela described this fundamental change in his own words:

The African National Congress was formed in 1912 to defend the rights of the African people which had been seriously curtailed by the South Africa Act, and which were then being threatened by the Native Land Act. For thirty-seven years – that is, until 1949 – it adhered strictly to a constitutional struggle. It put forward demands and resolutions; it sent delegations to the Government in the belief that African grievances could be settled through peaceful discussion and that Africans could advance gradually to full political rights. But White Governments remained unmoved, and the rights of Africans became less instead of becoming greater. In the words of my leader, Chief Luthuli, who became President of the ANC in 1952, and who was later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize: "Who will deny that thirty years of my life have been spent knocking in vain, patiently, moderately, and modestly at a closed and barred door? What have been the fruits of moderation? The past thirty years have seen the greatest number of laws restricting our rights and progress, until today we have reached a stage where we have almost no rights at all." (Mandela 1964)

The new combative style represented a paradigm shift from the organisation's traditional principle of non-violence. Also in 1961, the apartheid government declared South Africa a republic which meant it became fully independent of Britain. However, it continued to be viewed as colonial–capitalist by the liberation movements.

#### **4.2 Colonialism of a Special Type (CST)**

With the liberation movements having gone to ground in the face of an increasingly hostile government in South Africa and the armed struggle gaining momentum, the SACP convened a conference in 1962. Here the party adopted the *Road to South African Freedom* as its programme of action, which declared that South Africa was afflicted with Colonialism of a Special Type (CST). The latter described a situation in which the coloniser and the colonised lived side by side in the same country (SACP 1962), with a 'white South Africa' operating as the imperialist state and a 'non-white South Africa' being subordinated to colony status. On the one hand, three million whites enjoyed a monopoly over political rights and 87% of the land while, on the other hand, two-thirds of the population (making up the black communities) were the victims of national oppression, "robbed of their ancestral lands and only 13% set aside for African occupation". Not only were blacks denied access to economic activities, quality education and healthcare, they were also subjected to pass laws and workplace exploitation in the mines and industries and on the farms. The *Road to South African Freedom* programme endorsed the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) as a remedy for this Colonialism of a Special Type (CST) (SACP 1962).

The main thrust of the NDR was the national liberation of the African people and the elimination of every form of racially based discrimination or privilege. The NDR would restore the land and wealth of the country to the people and guarantee democracy, freedom and equality of rights and opportunities to all (SACP 1962). Pursuant to this, the SACP (1962) endorsed the *Freedom Charter* as the first stage in the NDR. The SACP acknowledged that the *Freedom Charter* was not a socialist programme but its implementation would be a step in the direction of bringing about a socialist state (Koster, 1986:42).

The country's increasingly strident political character was given a shot in the arm by the (by that stage) banned liberation movements under the aegis of the ANC's Morogoro Consultative Conference in Tanzania in 1969.

### 4.3 The Morogoro Consultative Conference (1969)

The ANC's seven-day Morogoro Consultative Conference held in Morogoro, Tanzania in 1969 was attended by more than 70 delegates drawn from various ANC branches, units of Umkhonto we Sizwe, and the respective leaderships of the Indian Congress, the Coloured People's Organisation and the revolutionary working class movements (Bunting, 1998:286). This conference was the first event of its kind to be held in a foreign country by the ANC-in-exile and it culminated in Oliver Tambo being elected as the president-general of the party with the responsibility of ensuring that the ANC functioned effectively, despite its covert character.

The conference adopted the first *Strategy and Tactics* document which stated that the main objective of the revolution was the national liberation of the largest and most oppressed group – the African people. The document went further, indicating that political and national liberation had to be accompanied by economic liberation because racism and capitalism in South Africa were so heavily intertwined (ANC 1969). The document endorsed the *Freedom Charter* and the change in tactics from passive resistance to an armed struggle against the apartheid government. Some years later, the launch of *The Green Book* signalled the ANC's desire to inject new thinking into its national liberation strategy.

### 4.4 The Green Book (1979)

With the memory of the 1976 Soweto Uprising still very vivid, the ANC started to review its strategy for achieving national liberation in South Africa (O'Malley n.d. b). In October 1978, ANC President-General Oliver Tambo led a delegation to Vietnam and on their return, a new committee was formed – the Politico-Military Strategy Commission – to review the ANC's liberation strategy. From this committee emerged a document that the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC) adopted in August 1979, called *The Green Book* (ANC 1979 a; O'Malley n.d. b).

*The Green Book* reiterated the primacy of political mobilisation and organisation over military strength. It also conveyed the general consensus that the military option was only one of the pillars of the broader political strategy (ANC 1979; O'Malley, n.d. b). In this regard, the book recommended, among other tactics, "the creation of the broadest possible national fronts for liberation" (Karis & Gerhart, 1997:303). This recommendation was implemented with the formation, in cooperation with other progressive forces, of the United Democratic Front<sup>9</sup> (UDF) in 1983 and the Congress of South African Trade Unions in 1985.

### 4.5 The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) (1985)

Upon its formation in December 1985, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) committed itself to bringing about a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa. COSATU was a consolidation of various unions that had been formed following the wave of strikes at the beginning of 1973, the latter marking a renewal of trade union activity after a decade-long lull. COSATU succeeded in forging greater unity among black unions and also formally associated itself with the ANC.

It was at its Second National Congress, which took place from 14 to 18 July 1987, that COSATU adopted the *Freedom Charter* (Magubane 1987:477). COSATU would later – like its predecessor, the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), which was a member of the Congress Alliance – become a member of the Tripartite Alliance along with the ANC and the SACP (Gumede, 2007:21). Coinciding with COSATU's launch in 1985 was another significant political event in the country's struggle history – the second and last National Consultative Conference staged by the ANC-in-exile in Kabwe, Zambia.

9 The United Democratic Front (UDF) was an anti-apartheid body comprising many anti-apartheid organisations. It was launched in 1983 in Mitchell's Plain, Cape Town (SAHO 2015).

#### 4.6 The Kabwe Consultative Conference (1985)

This conference was different from the ANC's first in-exile conference in Morogoro, Tanzania. This time the "ANC was a diplomatic colossus, riding the moral high ground and supported by the most powerful international solidarity campaign in history" (Turok 2008:29). While the conference ostensibly focused on political and security issues, the central theme was "the aim of seizure of power by the people through a combination of mass political action and armed struggle" (ANC 1985). The economic policy question was set aside but the ANC still endorsed the *Freedom Charter*. The principle of non-racialism was reinforced with the election of non-Africans to the NEC of the ANC. This was followed by the *Harare Declaration* and the long-awaited political transition in South Africa in 1994.

### 5. The ascension to government and changes to the NDR

The ANC's ascension to government was built on the *Harare Declaration*, the *Constitutional Guidelines* and the ANC's national conferences.

#### 5.1 The Harare Declaration and Constitutional Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa (1989)

In the late 1980s, a series of international and local events impacted on the struggle for liberation in South Africa. Internationally, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 – which led to the collapse of the USSR in 1991 – left the ANC with no international ally and few economic policy options. The *Constitutional Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa* released in 1989 were a blueprint for a democratic South Africa and also assured the world that the ANC was serious about bringing about meaningful change in the country. The document began by affirming the importance of the *Freedom Charter* as the champion of a future democratic South Africa, which needed to be turned into a constitutional reality (ANC 1989; Turok 2008:30). The ANC also promised that South Africa would have a mixed economy and that private property would be protected. In time, this gave way to a split in the interpretation of the *Freedom Charter* - one pro-nationalisation and one pro-private property - indicating a fundamental incoherence in ANC economic policy (Marais, 1998:143; Turok, 2008:31).

Also in 1989 the ANC-in-exile held a conference in Harare, Zimbabwe which set in motion the negotiations between South Africa's National Party (NP) government and the liberation movements. The *Harare Declaration* provided the framework for the negotiations. 1989 also saw the SACP convene their Seventh Congress in Havana, Cuba. Here *The Path to Power* was adopted, a document that reaffirmed the 1962 characterisation of South Africa as a CST and held that the NDR was the remedy for South Africa's "ills" because it aimed to bring about the liberation of African people, the destruction of the economic and political power of the racist ruling class, and the establishment of a united South Africa with a working class hegemony (SACP 1989).

On 2 February 1990 – a momentous day in South Africa's history and one that has been imprinted on many people's minds – the (then) president of the ruling National Party (NP) FW de Klerk stood before Parliament and announced the impending unbanning of the national liberation movements and release of political prisoners.

Later in 1990 the ANC held its first post-exile National Consultative Conference in Johannesburg, Gauteng. At the conference, resolutions were adopted on negotiations between the liberation movements and the NP government, and the suspension of the armed struggle (ANC 1990). The negotiations, termed the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), also commenced in 1990 and prompted simultaneous debates within the ANC about economic policy.

## 5.2 The ANC's National Conferences (1991 and 1994)

At the ANC's 48th National Conference in July 1991 in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, Nelson Mandela was elected the president-general of the party. The *Strategy and Tactics* document adopted at the conference declared that Colonialism of a Special Type (CST) was still intact, with the basic political, gender, social and economic relations of oppression and exploitation very much in evidence (ANC 1991). The document further declared the party's adherence to the principles enshrined in the *Freedom Charter*, but that such adherence was meaningless if the economy did not undergo fundamental restructuring to better serve the interests of the people and achieve far-reaching reforms in the areas of land redistribution, housing, education, health and wealth (ANC 1991).

Throughout the CODESA negotiations the ANC convened various political events and released documents that were heavily laced with economic policy proposals, such as the *Discussion Document on Economic Policy* (ANC 1990) based on the philosophy of 'growth through redistribution' and incorporating a commitment to a 'mixed economy'; the *Draft Resolution on ANC Economic Policy* (ANC 1991); and *Ready to Govern: ANC Policy Guidelines for a Democratic South Africa* (ANC 1992) which was the ANC's vision for the future of South Africa, including its stance towards a mixed economy. During this time the ANC began to act on its commitment to realise stronger economic growth, with the party's policies moving from 'growth through distribution' to 'redistribution through growth'. From 1992 to 1994, the ANC's economic thinking would increasingly reflect neoliberal attitudes (Marais, 1998:126).

The *Strategy and Tactics* document adopted at the ANC's 49th National Conference in Bloemfontein, Free State in 1994 reaffirmed the provisions of the *Freedom Charter* and noted that the transformation of the South African economy was a fundamental component of the process of bringing about non-sexist, democratic and non-racial development and equity (ANC 1994).

The above discussion underlines traces of what would eventually become a fundamental incoherence in the ANC's and the Tripartite Alliance's economic policy positions.

## 5.3 The Mafikeng Conference (1997)

On 22 December 1997, the ANC convened its 50th National Conference in Mafikeng (now Mahikeng) in the North West Province. The *Strategy and Tactics* document adopted there declared victory over the apartheid government and that "... a qualitative element of the NDR has been accomplished" (ANC 1997). The document also revised the objectives of the revolution to focus on the management of capitalism and the contradictions that arise there from: "The creation of a new society will not eliminate the basic antagonism between capital and labour. Neither will it eradicate the disparate and sometimes contradictory interests that some of the motive forces of the NDR pursue" (ANC 1997).

The ANC discussion document, *The state, property relations and social transformation* (1998), threw its weight behind the 1997 *Strategy and Tactics* document and also declared that:

The NDR does not aim to reshape property relations in the most fundamental way of creating a classless society where there are no exploiters and exploited. It does not seek to eliminate capital and capitalism. However, by definition, the NDR must see to the de-racialisation and democratisation of ownership, accumulation and allocation of capital, and it should do this in a manner that benefits the poor (ANC 1998).

## 5.4 The Polokwane Conference (2007)

The 52nd National Conference of the ANC held in Polokwane, Limpopo in December 2007 was characterised by fierce contestation between Jacob Zuma and Thabo Mbeki (who had been elected ANC president in 2002) and their respective supporters. Zuma's victory over Mbeki was dubbed a triumph for the leftist alliance, including the formations marginalised

under Mbeki, namely the SACP, COSATU and the ANC Youth League. The *Strategy and Tactics* document adopted at the 2007 National Conference revealed a shift away from a free market approach towards one advocating a developmental state and the creation of a National Democratic Society (NDS) (ANC 2007).

The NDR was viewed as the basis for an NSR (National Socialist Revolution), which constituted the ideal state to which the ANC aspired. Moreover, the NDR was perceived as the nerve centre of the movement to abolish three interrelated, antagonistic contradictions of Colonialism of a Special Type (CST): race, class and patriarchal relations of power (ANC 2007). Yet the *Strategy and Tactics* document reiterated that the NDR would not eradicate capitalist relations of production in general, and that class contradictions and class struggle – particularly between the working class and the bourgeois – would need to be played out in the best way possible.

### 5.5 The Mangaung Conference (2012)

At the ANC's National Policy Conference, which took place from 16 to 20 December 2012 in Mangaung in the Free State Province, a discussion document was adopted called *The Second Phase of the Transition: Building a National Democratic Society and the balances of forces in 2012*. The document claimed that the previous 18 years of democracy had been about political transition, which from the outset was inextricably linked to the push for freedom from socio-economic bondage, as captured in the motto: "A better life for all" (ANC 2012a). The document further claimed that the second phase of the transition would be socio-economic in nature, which would lead to an NDS (ANC 2012a).

The *Strategy and Tactics* document adopted at the conference emphasised the two phases of transition within the first stage of the NDR: the first phase being the political transition, lasting from 1994 to 2012, and the second phase being the socio-economic transition, commencing in 2012. Another important theme was that the ANC was still guided by the *Freedom Charter* (ANC 2012b).

## 6. Conclusion

The National Democratic Revolution (NDR) in South Africa has evolved over time to form the glue that has held the alliance against Colonialism of a Special Type/apartheid together. This has been the case since 1912. In this paper it was shown that the dialectical and revolutionary approach was not at first the natural ideological framework of the NDR. The worldviews of several leaders of the struggle were based on a peaceful and even Christian resolution to the political questions gripping South Africa. However, after rebuffs from Britain and the Boer Republics and the entrenchment of increasingly repressive measures, violence became – according to the leaders of the day – the only option and the NDR underwent a paradigm shift.

Furthermore, while the political solution that was envisaged for so long was largely delivered in 1994, and democratic principles now underpin the country's policy and legal frameworks, the country remains deeply divided in an economic sense and the revolutionary worldview and rhetoric still permeate everyday life. This is producing unprecedented levels of anger and social upheaval. Although signs of a lack of coherence in the ANC's economic policy started to appear several years ago, formal policymaking appears to be taking a back seat to the clearly more pressing concerns about divisions between the ANC and its Alliance partners, the general disarray in Parliament, a severely compromised economy, and a seemingly unstoppable tidal wave of angry, unemployed youth.

While the Tripartite Alliance members still subscribe to the principles of the NDR and *Freedom Charter*, the seeds have been sown for a new type of revolt – one that appears to eschew the type of intellectual reflection and reasoned (though often heated) debate



that were hallmarks of South Africa's earlier struggle history. Clearly, the socio-economic contradictions that the NDR was mandated to manage are proving to be unexpectedly complex. It will be interesting to see whether the ANC, its allies and other economic stakeholders in the country will ever be able to rise above their own immediate interests and deliver the ultimate vision of the NDR - "a better life for all".

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